

A PRIEST

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By:

Reverend Robert Nash, S.J.



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A PRIEST

In the heart of every right-minded Catholic there is firmly implanted an instinctive reverence for the priesthood. It is no matter of surprise to him to read of the tributes of respect paid to priests, even by those in high places. He can understand quite well that the Emperor Constantine would never himself sit down to table until the last priest was seated. It does not seem to him any extravagant veneration to find Saint Catherine of Siena kneeling on the dusty roadside and kissing the footprints of a priest. He gives unhesitating approval to the sentiment of Saint Francis of Assisi who writes that if he met a priest and an angel he would salute first the priest and, only after the priest, then, the angel. He is inclined to believe, or at least countenance, the anecdote that relates that before a certain priest's ordination his angel guardian was seen walking before him, but after ordination the angel followed behind. All this and much more, indicative of a deep reverence for the priesthood, seems to a Catholic the most natural thing in the world.

In much the same way does he regard the attacks of Christ's enemies on the priesthood. He expects the priest, as a matter of course, to be made a target for special venom in time of persecution. Our Lord promised His priests as much. "If the world hate you, know ye that it hath hated Me before you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember My word, which I said to you, "The servant is not greater than his Master. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

Passionate devotion to the priesthood on the one hand and violent hatred on the other—both are fully accounted for when we recall Our Lord's words to the effect that His priests are "chosen out of the world." They are His in quite a peculiar sense. Indeed so close is the bond of friendship between Christ and His priest that the glories of the priesthood are most easily summed up by saying that the priest stands before the world as "another Christ."

At Our Lord's Baptism, the heavenly Father pointed to Christ, standing in the waters of the Jordan, and declared to the world, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him." The Father makes that same wonderful declaration in favor of His priest. The Sacrament of Holy Orders imprints on the priest a "character" or mark by virtue of which he is set apart as being, in quite an especial manner, the property of God.

It is of course most true that every creature belongs absolutely to God, and that sanctifying grace elevates the creature to the wondrous dignity of Son of God. But, in addition to this, the priest is the well-beloved son. He is the Benjamin in God's great family, for his soul is enriched with exceptional graces. Theologians call him a "persona sacra"—a sacred person. A church is "sacred" because it is set apart exclusively for the

service of God. A vessel is “sacred” when it is used only at Mass or to hold the Blessed Sacrament. In the same way, a priest is “sacred” because he has entered into a contract with God to spend himself exclusively on what has to do with the service of God. On His side, God has accepted this offering and has sealed the priest as His well-beloved son. Just as the image stamped on the coin shows it to be true, or as the signature at the foot of a document proves it to be genuine, so this “character” or mark set upon the priest by God entitles him to a place of special honor in the ranks of God’s friends. That is why the priest, for the very reason that he is “another Christ,” must expect love from those who love Christ and bitter opposition from those who hate Christ.

Before embarking on the task of trying to unfold, even a little, the glories of the priesthood, it will be worthwhile delaying on that phrase of Our Lord, “Chosen out of the world.”

It is not easy to express the honor conferred upon the priest that is implied in these words. Long ago, early one morning, Our Lord, after a night spent in prayer, walked slowly down the slope of a hill and looked out over the multitudes that were swarming into the valley at His feet. He lifted up both arms in a commanding gesture showing that He wished to hold the crowd in check. Then, from those thousands standing before Him, He singled out twelve men to be His own special friends, men whom He would train and to whom He would entrust posts of danger or distinction in the kingdom He was about to establish.

A vocation to the priesthood implies that same choice. The whole world lies before Christ still; still He looks out over its teeming millions, only to pass them by in favor of the man He wants to be His priest, “chosen out of the world,” His “alter ego,” His “other self.”

Chosen by Christ the Son of God; chosen by Christ out of such a vast multitude; chosen by Christ to be entrusted by Him with a special mission—that is the priest’s vocation. Such a choice, by such a Person, and for such a purpose!

What anxiety Christ shows for their training throughout those three years of His public life! He will have them constantly by His side teaching them by His example. He will show them how to pray, how to preach, how to deal with the various types of men whom they will meet in the course of their work for souls. He will labor to effect a complete change in their mentality, for they must detach their affections from money and money’s worth and make it their one concern to lay up treasure in heaven. Then, when He has them about Him for the last time in the Supper Room, with what love He exposes His Sacred Heart before them! Even His divine eloquence is taxed in His effort to find words that will make them realize that that love is no chimera but a living flame that He wants to enkindle within their hearts so they may go out into the world and, in their turn, set other hearts on fire. It is the last time they will be together, and He knows how men

cherish with peculiar affection a parting gift from a loved friend. With all this circumstance of love surrounding the giving, He hands them His parting Gift—the Blessed Sacrament and the power to consecrate! Again, omnipotence is taxing its powers. Such a Gift! At such a time! In such a manner!

Judge from all this what Jesus Christ thinks of His priests. Now He speaks to the Father about them, and again there is the note of deep anxiety.

“I have manifested Thy name to them...I kept them in Thy name ... I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from evil ... Father, I will that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them ... Holy Father, keep them in Thy name whom Thou hast given Me.”

One would think He had done nothing else but train these twelve, and that now at the end the needs of the whole world were forgotten in His concern that “His own” should be preserved from harm.

In view of all this, may it not be said that if in anybody we may countenance legitimate pride it is in the priest? If all of us are bound to gratitude to God for His manifold gifts, who can be surprised at the wave of gratitude that sweeps over the soul of the priest as often as he recalls on one hand his own miseries, his numerous sins, his daily and perhaps almost hourly failures, and then on the other, the marvelous condescension of Christ, Who, knowing all about him, has bent down over him and lifted him up from the mire to place him with the princes of His people?

If the priest, by way of giving tangible proof of his gratitude, tries to tell of some of the great things wrought by Christ’s priesthood in his soul in the hope of exciting others to desire so holy a state and to pray that they, too, may be “chosen out of the world,” who shall accuse him of egoism? There is a wise and a holy egoism and it finds its place in the canticle of the humble, self-effacing Maiden of Nazareth. The Mother of God sang of the great things done to her by Him Who is mighty. Still the Mighty One does great things, exercising His divine power through the weak instrumentality of His priests. Can it be otherwise than fitting that these great things too should be sung, and that all men should praise His mercy, which reacheth from generation to generation?

We speak of the events of Our Lord’s life as “mysteries” because they contain a hidden or “mystical” meaning. For example, the cure of the blind man is a “mystery” because it is symbolical of the light of vision that Christ Our Lord has brought to the souls of men. Similar “mystical” or hidden meanings or applications may easily be discovered in most of the events of Christ’s life.

Now the life of a priest is also a “mystery” for in it there is much more than appears outwardly. In a very real sense, it is an extension or a continuation of the life of Our Lord

Himself. This is explained with wonderful beauty and accuracy by Our Lord when He tells His priests that they are the branches and He the Vine, and that if the branch is to bring forth fruit it must be grafted upon the Vine. From the Vine, it must draw the sap, divine grace, which is to give it life. It is true that this principle of divine life is imparted to everybody who is in the state of grace, but to the priest there is vouchsafed besides, an awful power over Christ's Real Body in the Blessed Eucharist, and over His Mystical Body, which is the Church. This twofold power makes the priest "another Christ" in a way different from and far superior to the way that that great title can be applied to others, even when they share fully in the life of God by sanctifying grace.

First, then, there is the priest's power over Christ's Real Body, the Blessed Eucharist—a power which surpasses all others ever given to man or angels. Clad in his priestly vestments, he stands, morning after morning at the altar of sacrifice and summons the Second Person of the All-Holy Trinity from heaven. To His priest's summons, Jesus Christ gives entire and instant obedience.

"O priest," exclaims Saint Augustine, "He Who created you gives you power to create Himself!"



Every morning at Mass, Jesus Christ is held up in the priest's hands, like the daily sunrise to send the light of His divine wisdom into men's minds, and the warmth of His divine love into their hearts. Every morning the priest stands face to face before that God with Whom Moses conversed in awe on Sinai. Every morning he enters, like the prophet of old, into the cloud that covers the mountain of sacrifice, and separated from men and the affairs of men, he speaks freely with the Almighty of all that concerns the glory of God and the eternal salvation of men's souls. He lovingly invites Jesus into his heart and Jesus gladly accepts the invitation. Reverently he takes Jesus Christ into his hands and shows Him to the people. Like another John the priest points to Christ saying, "Ecce Agnus Dei!" It is by the ministrations of His priest, that Christ is given to souls and souls to Christ in Holy Communion.

Our Blessed Lady brought Christ into the world one time. The priest does this every time he says Mass. Holy Simeon held Christ in his arms for a few brief moments, and the face of the venerable servant of God lighted up with happiness and his heart was thrilled with joy when he realized that that little Baby lying there was in very truth the long promised Messiah.

However, this "other Christ," the priest, takes Christ's sacred body into his hands every day, often several times in the same day. Saint John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, leaned one night against Christ's breast at supper and thence drew forth the secrets of love that he was afterwards to clothe in inspired language and give to the world. That happens to the priest too—and not once but quite often. For the priest bears Christ to His sick and dying, sometimes along the crowded thoroughfare of a busy street, sometimes over the weary tracks of a lonely mission, sometimes in the din of battle. Hidden and unknown—Christ and this "other Christ" make their way along, Christ as truly present in that little pyx as he was at the table of the Last Supper, and the priest's heart as close to the Sacred Heart as was the heart of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

At the altar, the priest not merely represents Christ. In a way, he repudiates the mystery of the Incarnation. He speaks as though he was, in very truth, Jesus Himself, when he says, "This is *My* Body; This is *My* Blood." Where can adequate words be found to express the overwhelming greatness of all this power?

After Moses had conversed with the Lord on Sinai, he came down the mountainside with the tables of the Law in his hands. He had received the commission from God to teach the children of Israel and, as a result of his nearness to God on the mountain, the prophet's face on his return was radiant with light. Men could not endure its brightness and he was forced to wear a veil while speaking to them.

The priest too must come down from the mountain and preach to the people. From his contact with Christ, he too has been enlightened and he feels rising up within him the

longing to impart that light to others. Here again the priest is the “other Christ,” preaching the eternal truths that came from the lips of Jesus of Nazareth. This “other Christ” “moves in and out amongst men and he is absorbingly interested in every single individual, for in every man, woman, and child who crosses his path he sees an immortal soul. That soul is dear to Jesus Christ. It is redeemed by His precious Blood and its destiny is, in a very short time, to be transplanted from this vale of tears to blossom all the fairer in a richer soil. That soul is destined to live in heaven, a home of everlasting peace and love and light and joy, where “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away.” (Apoc. 21,4).

To the priest who, as a result of his intimacy with Christ, now sees this life from the standpoint of eternity, how pitiable it must be to watch men toying on the verge of the grave with an empty pleasure that is gone almost before it is tasted. How pitiable to watch men immersed in pursuit of a gain that rust or moth can so speedily consume. How pitiable to watch men drifting aimlessly through life, in no way interested or concerned about the great Eternity that is on the point of engulfing all these small things, even as an evening tide, sweeps away the castles of sand built by children on a summer’s day!

That too is Our Lord’s standpoint. He saw so clearly the value and beauty and destiny of a soul that He was prone to manifest a divine impatience with folk who were engrossed in worldly interests. He was impatient with them who were engrossed with their farms, their buying and selling, or throwing off the yoke of a hated foreign oppressor. They were so engrossed that one would think these things were to last forever.

Hence, the theme constantly recurring in His teaching to them is the soul and its eternal salvation. He is the Light of the World. He came into the midst of men whose minds were darkened so He might show them to themselves. The divine light shining from His countenance sent its rays far beyond the confines of time and reached out mightily unto the portals of eternity. His great task was to rouse men from their listlessness, to startle them into realizing that they each had an immortal soul, and that its salvation was so overwhelmingly important that no name was too hard for a folly that would risk it, even to gain the whole world.

That same exact lesson is constantly on the lips of the “other Christ.” He comes down from the altar to go out into the world and broadcast “in season and out of season” the great eternal truths of the soul and its salvation. Like His Master, he walks through a world sodden in materialism, and dings into men’s ears that they have not here a lasting city, and must seek first the kingdom of God and His justice.

Christ has equipped His priest with marvelous powers to arm him for his task of changing men’s hearts and lifting up their desires from earth to heaven. In his dealings with souls,

the priest sees, under his own eyes, reproduced in his own life, the very miracles wrought by Jesus Christ Himself in His lifetime. However, before we consider the priest actually exercising Christ's power over souls, it will be good to have a clear notion of the meaning of Christ's Mystical Body.

Saint Paul develops at considerable length the thesis that, by Baptism, we become members of Christ's Body.

"As the body is one and hath many members," he writes to the Corinthians, "and all the members of the body, whereas they are many yet are one body, so also is Christ. For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body." And he pursues the comparison by showing how the members of the human body depend upon each other for their well-being; how they must be "mutually careful, one for another," rejoicing for each other's glory, and all suffering together for any misfortune which may fall upon any one of them. There is thus a very close bond of union between the different members of the human body, and Saint Paul draws the conclusion that that same union exists between Christ and His Church, and between the different members of the Church. "Now *you* are the body of Christ," he declares, "member of member." He has the same sublime teaching for the Ephesians: "We are members of His Body, of His flesh and of His bones."

In what sense can it be said that we constitute the Body of Christ? It is clear that the Apostle cannot be speaking of Christ's *real* Body. His *real* Body was crucified on Good Friday. What he means is that we are Christ's *mystical* body. We have to try to see what this term stands for.

Between the members of every society, there must be some bond of union that constitutes them "a body." For example, a body of people unites to govern a country, to take care of its finances, to manufacture, to sell, to educate children, to build, or to organize a program of sports. We see such bodies everywhere—linked together by a common interest.

This link exists between the members of Christ's Church, for we are bound together in the Church by one great common interest, the salvation of our souls. However, that link is barely sufficient to justify Saint Paul's forceful expression that we are the body of Christ. There is a much stronger bond of union between Christ and ourselves, and it is nothing less than this, that we live the life of Christ. By means of sanctifying grace, the soul is engrafted on Christ, and His life flows freely into the soul, enriching the soul in a truly astonishing manner, beautifying it, and giving it power to perform actions which of itself it never could do.

Divine grace then, links us thus intimately with Christ and makes us His mystical body. By grace we actually become, says Saint Peter, "sharers in the divine nature." Sinners too enjoy membership in this mystical body, though only imperfectly, since they have once

received grace through the Sacrament of Baptism. Now this principle of divine life is communicated to our souls by means of the sacraments. The merits of Christ, through which alone we have access to this divine grace, are stored up in the Hill of Calvary as in a great reservoir. The reservoir is infinite in its capacity because the merits of Christ are infinite. The sacraments are like the conduit-pipes by means of which this precious treasure is borne along into our souls. However, who will unlock this treasure house? Where is the key to open up for our souls these “unsearchable riches of Christ?” It has been placed in the hands of His priest, for grace comes through the sacraments, and the priest is the ordinary minister of the sacraments. Hence, his power over the mystical body of Christ.

What are the priest’s credentials for exercising this power? Our Lord Himself tells us. To His priest He gives the divine commission to baptize and to preach the gospel to every creature. To His priest He says, “As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you.” To the priest He gives power to absolve from sin, even as He absolved; “Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained,” At the Last Supper, having changed bread and wine into His own Body and Blood, He imparted to His priests a like wonderful power when He said, “Do this in commemoration of Me.” The priest need not fear to speak Christ’s message to the world, for he has the divine authority of Christ behind his words:

“He that heareth you, heareth Me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me.” “It is not you that speak but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.” (Saint Matt. x, 18, 19). Surely from all this it is abundantly clear that the priest is indeed Christ’s ambassador, fully accredited, fully authorized to speak in His name, and to open to the faithful the treasures of divine grace stored up through the merits of Christ. It will now be in place to look at the priest actually engaged in exercising this divine power in his dealings with the souls of men, and to note carefully the striking similarity between his work and the work done by Jesus Christ.

During His lifetime, men possessed by evil spirits were more than once brought before Our Lord to be cured. Thus, Saint Mark describes a broken-hearted father beseeching Christ to expel an unclean spirit from his son. With power and authority, He also commanded the evil spirit saying, “I command thee to go out from him and enter not into him anymore.”

“And going out,” adds the evangelist, “and greatly tearing him, he went out of him.”

To the “other Christ” too, is frequently brought a child possessed by an evil spirit. Through no fault of its own every child born into this world enters life seared with original sin. No sooner is the child born than the first care of its parents is to bring it to the priest, and, like the father in the gospel, to entreat him, “If thou canst do anything,

help us, having compassion on us.” And the “other Christ” looks, as His divine Master would look, at the poor possessed child before him, and with all the dignity and authority of Christ he addresses the unclean spirit saying, “Depart, unclean spirit, out of this creature fashioned of God, Get thee hence, and give place to the Holy Spirit of God.” At that instant, the idol of sin is shattered into a thousand fragments in the soul of that little child, and in its place God sets up His own kingdom by grace. Why? Because Satan dare not disobey the command of Christ spoken by the lips of the priest. One does not wish to equate the unbaptized infant with the case of ordinary diabolical possession, but the rite of baptism performed by the priest cannot but remind one forcibly of the exorcisms performed by Our divine Lord on earth.

In Christ, the lepers, outcasts from society, found a friend and a helper. One day a poor victim of the dread disease crawled out after Him and fell on his knees before Him. Imploringly stretching out his fingerless hands, he cried, “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean,” Our Lord looked at the wretched, broken specimen of humility kneeling there before Him and, with exquisite refinement of kindness, touched the leper and said, “I do will it. Be thou made clean.” Instantly, the leprosy fell from him and, in a transport of joy and gratitude, he rose to his feet, a new man.

Outcasts from the kingdom of heaven, who have lost their baptismal innocence and contracted the more terrifying leprosy of mortal sin, find their way to the feet of the “other Christ.” The poor soul comes to unbare before the priest the hideous sores it has contracted; to pour out its story of shame and sorrow in the sacred tribunal of the sacrament of Penance. The poor soul is under sentence of death, death eternal, because mortal sin completely severs all union with Christ—the source of life. Again, like his Master, the “other Christ,” looks with love on this poor outcast. He touches its sores, and lo, they fall to the ground. He reverses the sentence of eternal damnation by saying, “I absolve thee from thy sins. Go and now sin no more. Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee. I will it. Be thou made clean.”

Is it any wonder that strong men have wept sweet tears in the Confessional? Is it to be surprised at that they have written exultantly of the joy and the peace surpassing all understanding, which inundated their souls when they arose from their knees after a good Confession? This “other Christ” has spoken with the authority of Jesus Christ, and at his word the gates of heaven, just now barred against the sinner, slowly swing back and open wide, and the beauty and the light and the warmth of God’s grace stream once more down into the soul. It is an intoxicating happiness, reflecting itself in the face of him who, ten minutes ago knew himself to be a leper, but who now, on looking into his soul, finds it to be as pure and as sinless as it was on the day of his Baptism. Christ restored the life

of the body to Lazarus and to the daughter of Jairus, and there was much astonishment. Much more marvelous is the resurrection of a soul from death to the life of grace, and that miracle

the “other Christ” using the power Christ has deigned to give him, performs times without number, perhaps many thousand times in the course of a single year! Not until the end of the world will the story be told of the peace restored, of the sin prevented, of the victories gained over passion, through the ministrations of the “other Christ” in the Sacrament of Penance.

Finally, who is so welcome at the deathbed as the priest? The sisters of Lazarus sent a message one day to Christ saying, “Behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.” The same message is borne to the “other Christ,” for none but he can “give the courage and the strength necessary for the poor soul trembling on the brink of eternity. Non-Catholics often gaze in wonder at the effects of Extreme Unction and Viaticum. To those who are left behind, the visit of the priest is also a source of comfort. Jesus consoled the brokenhearted widow of Naim. He made provision for His own loved Mother on the Hill of Calvary. He held out the promise of paradise to the repentant thief dying by His side. The “other Christ” too, has a like message of comfort for those who mourn the loss of a loved one. So saturated has his mind become with the thoughts which filled the mind of His divine Master that his words of consolation ring with a conviction and a sincerity that makes them like balm to those on whose shoulders the cross has been laid.

All that has been said to illustrate the power of the priest over Christ’s mystical body is well summed up by the great French writer, Lamartine, when he says, “There is a man in every parish, having no family, but belonging to a family that is worldwide, who is called in as a witness and adviser in all the important affairs of human life.

No one comes into the world or goes out of it without his ministrations. He takes the child from its mother’s arms and parts with him only at the grave. He blesses and consecrates the cradle, the bridal chamber, the bed of death, and the bier. He is one whom innocent children instinctively venerate and reverence. He is one to whom men of venerable age come to seeking wisdom, and call him father. He is one at whose feet men fall down, lay bare the innermost thoughts of their souls, and weep their most sacred tears. He is one whose mission is to console the afflicted and soften the pains of body and soul. To his door come the rich and the poor. He belongs to no social class, because he belongs equally to all. He is one, in fine, who knows all, has a right to speak unreservedly, and whose speech, inspired from on high, falls on the minds and hearts of all with the authority of one who is divinely sent, and with the constraining power of one who has an unclouded faith.”

Seeing that Our Lord has conferred such great privileges on His priest, it is only natural to ask what He expects from His priest in return. Throughout this paper, we have insisted that the priest is “another Christ.” All his ideals, aspirations, and obligations are contained in those two words. Let him aim day and night at imitating Jesus Christ, His way of speaking and thinking and acting—His zeal, His charity, His utter self-forgetfulness. A picture flung on the screen may, at first, be out of focus, and we see only an ugly, confused daub. However, little by little the focus is adjusted and, as we continue to look, little by little the details come out more perfectly, until finally, when the focus is perfect, all is clear before us. Now, no comparison is faultless, but it may be said that the priest’s one obligation is, to become more and more like to Jesus Christ every day.

“Let this mind be in you,” writes Saint Paul, “which also was in Christ Jesus.” Every day should see an adjustment of the *focus*, so men who have to deal with a priest come to regard him as being, in very truth, “another Christ.” In their turn, they point to him and say, “Ecce Agnus Dei.” For them, that expression has become an epitome of the life of the faithful priest.

This process of “Christification” is largely brought about under the transforming influence of the grace of God. However, cooperation with that grace is necessary, and the priest cooperates especially by becoming a mediator, even as His divine Model was a mediator. What does this imply?

A mediator is one who reconciles those who are at enmity. Two friends have a quarrel, and it is the office of the mediator to come between them and plead for mutual forgiveness. When Our Lord came into this world, He found that sin had opened a chasm between Our Father and ourselves. No one but He could bridge over that chasm because the insult offered to the infinite dignity of God by sin demanded that atonement should be made by a Person infinite in dignity. So, Our Lord’s task was twofold—to plead with men to leave the ways of sin and do penance, and to plead with His Father in heaven to forgive them in view of His own merits and their repentance.

When we turn over the pages of Christ’s life, we see that that twofold work was always kept by Him steadily in mind.

He went around doing good, healing all manner of diseases, raising the dead to life, feeding the hungry, giving sight to the blind, cleansing the lepers. Sinless Himself, He ever showed Himself the Friend of sinners. Transparently sincere Himself, He lashed hypocrisy mercilessly. All this love and mercy and sincerity He exercised in fulfillment of the first part of His office as Mediator—to draw men to Himself. One day, He stood, clothed in His long white flowing garment in the laneway outside Capharnaum, and, stretching out His arms wide in a comprehensive gesture, He spoke for the first time that invitation that ever since has sent a thrill of hope and love and joy through men’s hearts:

“Come to Me,” He exclaimed, “all you that labor and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up My yoke upon you and learn of Me that I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls.”

There, clearly expressed, is the first part of His mission as Mediator—to make men and women understand His craving for their real good, for their lasting happiness, because He well knows that if once His love seizes on their hearts it will prove to be their passport to eternal life.

Secondly, this divine Mediator had to plead with His Father to forgive men their sins. To see how He does this we must kneel at His bleeding feet on Calvary. Never again will those feet travel on their long errands of mercy, for men have nailed them to the cross and, from the wounds made by the ugly nails, the Precious Blood is flowing freely. The hands of Christ, which were never used except to bless and to heal, are held in place by two nails. The Face of Christ, most beautiful among the sons of men, has been disfigured with blows, and now it is covered with blood and spittle. In mockery of His kingship, they have crowned His head with thorns. Not satisfied with all this, even now in His dying hour, they mock Him saying, “Vah! Thou that destroyest the temple of God and in three days dost rebuild it! Save Thyself! Come down from the Cross and we will believe in Thee! He saved others; Himself He cannot save!”

However, another voice is heard. The eyes of the dying Christ, weighted down as they are with blood and spittle, are forced open and, with infinite compassion in them, He looks on those strange children of men below. There is no anger, no indignation, only sorrow, only pity, an utterly selfless pity for their great hardness of heart. The dried lips are parted and for a moment the jeers stop for they see He is about to speak. The voice of Christ, strong and clear even in His dying hour, sends out its echo over the Hill when He says, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.” That amazing cry, dictated by the infinite love in the Heart of Christ, rends the heavens and rises up as far as the Great White Throne. It was, most of all, in that cry that Christ fulfilled the second part of His office of Mediator—to implore the Father to have mercy and to spare.

Now the “other Christ” must be a mediator also. His task too, is a twofold one—to draw men from the mire of sin and worldliness and to plead with the Father to have mercy upon them. How is he to do this? He had two principal instruments to his hand—Prayer and Sacrifice.

In our own day, a great priest was canonized— Saint John Vianney. Everybody knows of the prodigious number of pilgrims who swarmed from all parts of Europe to listen to the simple sermons that fell from the lips of this very simple country priest. Everybody knows of the marvelous conversions wrought in the Curé’s narrow “coffin,” his

Confessional, where for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four he sat hearing Confessions, giving advice on the most varied and the most abstruse problems. In his own words, “reproving, entreating, rebuking, in all patience and doctrine.”

What is the secret of the Curé of Ars? Whence did he draw the light he needed, the infinite fund of patience, the power to attract souls thus to himself, and pass them on to God? Beyond question, his wonderful influence for good was the outcome of a life of close union with God through prayer. He is a living example of the teaching of Our Lord concerning the Vine and the branches. His union with Christ gave a ring of sincerity to the Curé’s simple sermon. Because he was closely united with God, his words had a power to pierce through the crust of sin and selfishness encasing the hearts of those who heard him. The walls of pride fell before him, and men struck their breasts in compunction. Human eloquence, natural talent, has indeed its place in the priest’s armory against sin and Satan, but it is a secondary place. The work of drawing souls to God is a supernatural work, to be accomplished only by supernatural means. Foremost amongst these supernatural means is Prayer. Prayer is, therefore, in the forefront among the instruments to be used by the priest in drawing souls to God.

To make atonement to God’s offended majesty and to draw down forgiveness on the sinner, there is no more potent means than sacrifice. It was in the great sacrifice of Calvary that the first Mediator pleaded, most efficaciously, for men’s forgiveness. The “other Christ,” too, must go up the mount of sacrifice, and, by his mortified life, plead, as his great prototype pleaded, “Father, forgive them.”

Our Lord will make no compromise in the matter of the absolute renunciation necessary for His priest. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me.” A hard saying, yes, but, in the light of Calvary, not so hard.

Even in this life, a generous God bestows a wonderful reward on the priest who gives himself to prayer and to sacrifice.

That reward consists in the fact that He makes His priest His temple. Saint Paul is constantly stressing the truth that we are God’s living temples, in which He deigns to take up His permanent abode. Now, the Jewish temple of old was used for a twofold purpose—for prayer and for sacrifice. Because it was a house of prayer, Our Lord’s anger was enkindled against the buyers and sellers, and He made a whip of cord and drove them out, complaining that they had made the house of His Father a den of traffic.

The ancient temple was used also for sacrifice. Every morning and every evening the blood of the victim flowed in the temple, in acknowledgment of God’s supreme dominion over life and death. Now the soul that is kept exclusively for these two same purposes becomes, in turn, God’s temple also. He willingly enters in that soul, as into His own proper abode, to set up His kingdom there.

“When God,” writes Saint Teresa, “finds our souls like empty vessels, at once He fills them with Himself.”

No wonder such a priest has influence over souls, for it is not He who speaks and acts, but the spirit of God Who speaks and acts through him. No wonder such a priest is always happy, for, to quote once more the loved Curé of Ars, “in a heart united to God it is always springtime.”

Why have we chosen to write these pages, and to attempt, however inadequately, to unfold some of the beauties and privileges and powers of the priesthood? While writing, we have had in view one class of reader particularly. It is that class composed of our boys leaving school to go out and fight life’s battle. They are coming to a crossroads in their lives and it is of tremendous importance that, at these crossroads, they should take the turn intended for them by Almighty God.

After the birth of John the Baptist, friends and neighbors gathered to congratulate the parents. On the way home, a question arose instinctively to their lips asking, “What, think you, shall this boy be?” As they recounted all the marvels that had preceded the boy’s birth—the vision of Zachary, his loss of speech, his cure, and his canticle of gratitude—they could not but expect that this boy was chosen in the designs of God for a special mission. “What will he be, think you, seeing all the great things that God has done for him?”

That same question must form itself on the lips of every young man as he reaches the crossroads of life. “How am I going to proceed? What shall I be? What shall I do with my life?”

It is quite possible that Christ is waiting for you at the crossroads, waiting there to offer you a vocation. Do not shrug your shoulders at the idea. You cannot, if you sit back and quietly realize the responsibility that the mere possibility lays upon you.

It is good to know what the Church requires in a candidate to the priesthood. She asks for two qualities—a right intention and fitness. A right intention implies that the candidate desires to be a priest, for example, to escape serious temptation; to make his salvation more secure; to carry Christ’s message to distant lands; or to be an instrument in Christ’s hands for the salvation of the souls of others. Any of these would fulfill the first condition.

The second is fitness—fitness of body, so the candidate has sufficient strength for the work he proposes to do in the priesthood, fitness of mind, so he is possessed of at least average brains; and, last and most important, moral fitness. Moral fitness means that the applicant is free from serious habits of vice and is of a character capable to be trained to the practice of a holy life.

These are the essential qualities. It is not required that a boy feel a great longing to be a priest or that he experience an interior prompting from the Holy Spirit, urging him into the ranks of Christ's priests. Such a longing or prompting may or may not be present. In either case, it is no criterion of a true vocation. It does indeed strengthen the case for the boy, and gives still greater reason to hope for his final perseverance, but, even if it be absent, or not felt very intensely, there is still much to be considered before deciding that there is no vocation. A boy has a responsibility, then, to draw near and consult Jesus Christ at the crossroads. God though He be, Our Lord can bestow no greater privilege on a boy. Such a choice! By such a Person! And for such a mission!

By all means, pray for a vocation. If you are in doubt, ask advice; nobody is going to try the foolish task of forcing a vocation on you if it is clear that you have not one. All we urge here is that the question of vocation should be faced seriously, not ignored or dismissed lightly as being something utterly impossible. So much depends on a boy's choice!

Look up and down the ranks of the priesthood for a moment. One night, a little French boy, Claude Liseur, tossed about restlessly in bed. He could not sleep for the fire of the love of Jesus Christ was burning in his heart. Therefore, the little lad, only nine and a half, crawled out of bed and, kneeling there in the darkness, he promised God that he would give his whole life to His service. Eighty years passed by, and Claude Liseur is lying on his deathbed, an old, worn-out Jesuit missionary priest in distant India. Just before the end, he looks up with a happy smile into the face of the priest beside him. "Father," he says, "I am ninety, and, thanks to God's infinite mercy, I have never committed a mortal sin." Was Claude Liseur sorry, I wonder, that he had taken the correct turn at the crossroads of life?

A young Spaniard was studying at the Paris University. He was a brilliant student, and had ambition. He would be a luminary in that home of learning, and have the whole world singing his praises. At the same university, there was another Spaniard, who, once himself worldly-minded, had now been won completely to the cause of Christ. He saw that his compatriot would sweep the world for Christ if once he could be made to see life as Christ sees it. So Ignatius, the convert, proceeded to waylay Francis, the young dreamer of dreams, "Francis," he would say, "what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" At first, Francis only laughed at him, but Ignatius would not give up. Little by little, the light came to Francis. He had been pursuing shadows. He would give himself to God—and he did, and not in half-measures.

He became a priest and went out to India, and toiled night and day for the salvation of souls. What thousands he won only the great reckoning angel knows. Certain it is that

thousands, literally, found their way to the feet of Christ who never would have known Him but that Francis Xavier went to the Indies. Does Francis Xavier, I wonder, regret the turn he took at the crossroads?

Aloysius Gonzaga was a marquis. If you have seen his picture, you probably think of him as a stern, unbending ascetic, and you are right. He was stern—ruthlessly so—on himself. However, he had to be. He knew himself much better than most of us know ourselves, and he realized if he did not hold himself mercilessly in check, he might very easily fall into frightful vices—the seeds of which, indeed, he had inherited from his none too righteous forbears. He made up his mind to fling aside worldliness and renounce his marquisate. Sensible people shook their wise heads and told him plainly he had lost his mind. The fact was that he had found it. He realized the value of his soul and the dangerous state surrounding it. Therefore, he carried his purpose through, *and* now he is a canonized saint. Our late Holy Father appointed him as patron of the very people whom this paper has most in view—boys at the crossroads of life. He was a saint, when he might so easily have slipped and made shipwreck of his life! Does Aloysius repent his choice at the crossroads? Is he sorry, now, that he held those seething passions in a grip of steel and consecrated his purity, inviolably, to Jesus and Mary? How utterly unworthy of attention and consideration is everything when one comes thus close up against reality!

A young man had been following Our Lord. The personality of this Jesus of Nazareth, His unselfishness, His doctrine of the soul and salvation, His unending patience to instill this lesson on every possible occasion—all this had awakened a desire in the young man's heart to break with the toys of worldliness and do something worthwhile with his life. So, one day he looked wistfully into the eyes of Christ and eagerly asked, "Good Master, what must I do to gain eternal life?"

The answer was clear. "If," said Our Lord, "you would enter into life, keep the Commandments."

"But I have kept them all from my youth. What is still wanting of me?" There was a hunger to do something more. Christ's cause was so noble that this young man wanted to distinguish himself in His service. What were the conditions?

"If you will to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and come and follow Me. And you shall have treasure in heaven."

The rich young man went away sad for he had great possessions. The world was too sweet. The hard sayings of Christ were too hard. He would try to satisfy himself with half measures. He came up to the crossroads and received his directions. Is *he* glad now, one wonders, at the decision he made?

How many souls depend, in the inscrutable designs of God's Providence, for their eternal salvation, on the choice *you* are going to make at the crossroads?

"To live in the midst of the world without wishing its pleasures; to be a member of each family, yet belonging to none; to share all sufferings; to penetrate all secrets; to heal all wounds; to go from man to God and offer Him their prayers; to return from God to man to bring pardon and hope; to have a heart of gold for charity and a heart of bronze for chastity; chastity; to teach and to pardon; to console and bless always. My God, what a life! And it is yours, O priest of Jesus Christ!"

— Lacordaire —



De Licentia Sup. Ordin.

J.J. Coyne, SJ.

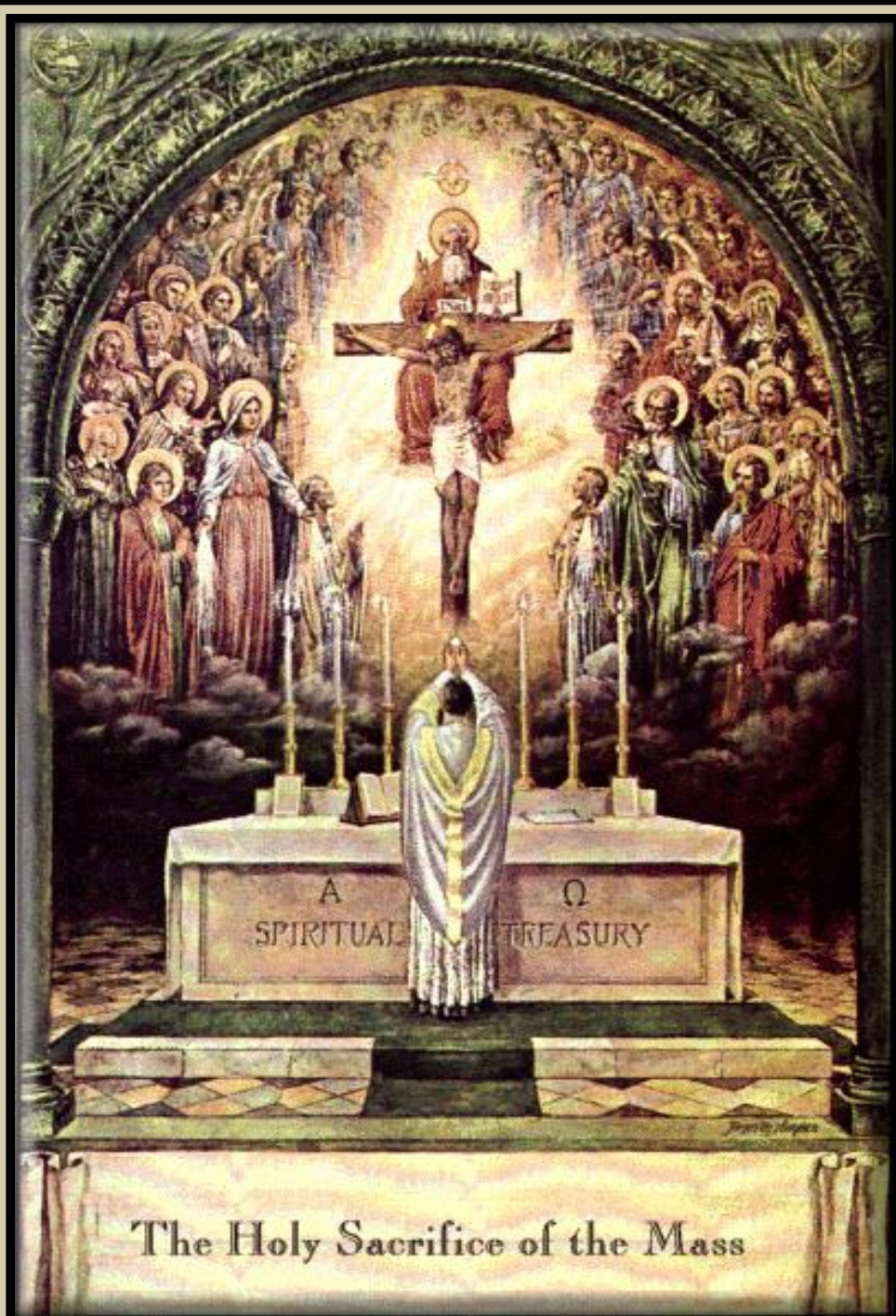
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